

And the beat goes on  
by SinnersandSaints

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Summary: This follows Trink and Penweed starting 4 years after the end of the movie. Sweet, fluffy Christmas moments moving into more serious subjects including parenthood and upcoming chapters about Vietnam. Rated T just in case I missed anything, but there is no language or smut to be seen.

## 1. Chapter 1

Author's note: I don't own Hairspray. I'm not being paid for any of this. I love the movie and it has inspired my imagination to run wild.

/END NOTE/

The wind gently blew the snow around on the ground outside. Though Tracy Larkin, formerly Turnblad, was safe from the freezing temperatures out there, she felt a chill run down her spine. Warm arms encircled her and her husband placed his bare chest to her back. Tracy fought the blush she could never quite escape. She had never forgotten just how lucky she was.

"You're always here in the nick of time," she said, appreciatively accepting his warm arms around her.

"It's my job to anticipate your needs." His voice was deep and soothing. The rumble in his chest vibrated against her back. He leaned down and kissed her on the top of her head. She bit her bottom lip to keep from giggling. "I can see your reflection in the window," he said. Tracy relaxed in his arms and laughed. "I love that I never have to wonder how you feel about me. You're so expressive. Your face, your smile, your attitude says it all." She sighed dreamily. "C'mon. It's cold. Let's go back to bed."

"No can do, hubby," she said, turning around and placing her palms against his chest. "I promised Penny I'd help her find the perfect

Christmas gift for Seaweed."

"Hm, well Trace, when he and I were walking home from visiting Corny the other day, we passed by the shoe shop. He's really got his eye on that new pair of PF flyers they have in the window."

"She's been saving every cent she has. I'm sure she could afford three pairs by now. Anyway, what do you want for Christmas, Mr. Larkin?" He smiled at her, and the corners of his eyes wrinkled ever so slightly. His boyish good looks had given way to those of a handsome man and loving husband. The contents of his heart had matured as well. Tracy couldn't go long without looking at him, not because of his physique but because of the way he looked at her. She might never get used to being so adored.

"Everything I need is right here in my arms, Mrs. Larkin." She often felt unworthy, but the luckiest in love often felt mismatched. She reached and he settled, or at least the doubts in her mind would drag down her smile with that thought. She felt her chin being lifted. She hadn't realized her gaze had dropped and she'd been staring at his chest.

"My eyes are up here, frowny," he joked. He leaned down and pecked her on the lips. "What's with that frown, anyway?"

"Silly, stupid thoughts. Nothing important." Link made a face but let her explanation go. The phone began to ring.

"I'll get that. You get ready, okay darlin'?" Link winked at her. Tracy began to get ready. She decided to forgo ratting her hair, something she rarely did anymore, because she'd smash her 'do with a cap anyway. She began pulling her shirt over her head when her stomach began churning. Tracy grabbed her midsection and fell to her knees. She breathed deeply until the feeling stopped. She passed gas moments later, thankful Link hadn't been around for it. Her mother had taught her that ladies should never pass gas in front of men. The thought of doing so mortified her anyway. She loved Link, and though she realized he would understand that she was human, she couldn't get it out of her head that it just wasn't right to share that part of her life. To her relief, Link must have felt the same way. Link's grandmother (whom he still called 'Gammy' much to Tracy's amusement) had told her that eventually she and Link would be comfortable enough to, quote, "let them rip" anywhere. Gammy was certain to know a lot more about marriage than she did. Tracy had dated her one true love for two years and had only been married for another two, but she doubted that sharing gas would be something they would add to their relationship anytime soon.

"Little darlin'?" Link asked through the bathroom door. "Is everything alright in there? Penny's here."

"Yeah Link, I'm fine," she said, pushing herself up from the floor. She grabbed her toothbrush and made a quick run over her teeth. She walked into their shared bedroom and spun around on her heel. She lifted her hair with her arms and looked at him over her shoulder.

"Can you zip this shirt? Oh, and snap the top button? I left it undone because I considered ratting my hair, but I'm not gonna." Link stared at her for a moment, a smirk playing on his lips. He stepped

forward and zipped and buttoned the shirt. He gently kissed the back of her neck. Tracy turned back around and gave her husband a chaste kiss. He was still in his pajama bottoms but now he wore a white t shirt as well.

"Be careful, okay?" he asked, his eyebrows creasing.

"Of course!" she chirpped. She skirted past him, and Link took a moment to slap her rear end. Tracy gasped and Link laughed. She made a silly face back at him. Link blew her a kiss. Tracy caught it and put it in her pocket. Penny appeared in the doorway and started dragging Tracy out of the bedroom.

"Bye Link!" she called over Tracy's shoulder. The smitten look remained on Tracy's face the whole time Penny was pulling her out of her bedroom.

"Penny, be cool!" Tracy said, snatching up her coat and slinging it over her shoulders. Penny pulled Tracy's hat down over her head. Tracy had to adjust it. She and Penny walked out of her front door and down the hallway.

"It's cool enough outside for both of us, and I'm running late on finding the perfect gift for my hot chocolate dream man!"

"You know, you don't have to keep bringing up that he's a negro."

"I do so, Tracy Turnblad Larkin, because I'm proud to be a checkerboard chick," she beamed, pushing open the entry door to Tracy's apartment building. She held the door open for Tracy and they walked outside together, pulling their coats closer to themselves.

"The point is you shouldn't care what race he is."

"I don't care that he's black but I am proud that we're an interracial couple, Tracy. Jeez, you're pretty snappy today."

"I'm sorry, Penny. Truth be told, I really kind of wanted to stay in bed with Link."

"I'm glad you've found the perfect Christmas present for Link, but I don't have time to waste!"

"The perfect... Penny, how many days is it until Christmas?"

"Three! Gosh, Tracy, what has gotten into you? Tracy? Tracy!"

"What?" Tracy asked, feeling as though she'd never be able to uncross her eyes.

"Oh thank God you're awake!"

"What? Why am I on the ground?"

"Tracy you just passed out. I'm going to get Link to come and help you back inside."

"No! Penny! I have to help you with Seaweed!"

"Don't worry about it. There's something wrong with you."

"I'm fine and... oh gosh, Penny! I don't have a present for Link!"

"You? Half of the world's most perfect couple? Finally a fault!" Penny cheered. Tracy glared at her, and then Penny sheepishly helped her up from the ground. The girls started walking again.

"I'm just under stress that's all. And my sugar has probably bottomed out. I haven't eaten yet today."

"Right, then. We'll grab a quick bite but we have to hurry! I have no idea what to get Seaweed!"

"Link said that when he and Seaweed were leaving Corny's house the other day that he was looking at a pair of shoes in the window at the shoe store."

"That's not good enough, Tracy!" Penny moaned. She pushed open the door of a cafe'. A large cattle bell above the door jangled. Tracy and Penny squeezed into a booth.

"G'mornin' dolls!" the waitress said. She gave Penny a menu and then handed one to Tracy.

"Morning Darlene!" Penny said, her grin stretching across her face. Darlene was a new friend of Penny's. She was a black woman who also happened to be openly engaged in an interracial relationship with a tall, thin white guy nicknamed Twiggy. "How is Twiggy?"

"He's great, he's at his Dad's house working on cars. You know him, ever the shade tree mechanic!" she smiled. "How's your boyfriend doing?"

"Seaweed is great! He's teaching jazz tap to the ten year old class right now."

"Does that man ever stop?"

"Never!" Tracy and Penny said in unison, much to Darlene's amusement.

"So what can I get you?"

"I'd like the biggest, fattest, greasiest burger you have, a chocolate shake, an order of onion rings and an order of french fries and..." she frowned. "I guess that'll be it for now. I'm not that hungry."

"What about you, Tracy?" Darlene asked. Tracy didn't know Darlene well, but she was used to being recognized around town not only because of her stint on the Corny Collins show, but because of the mishandling of the truth with the police officer and the aftermath of the Ms. Hairspray pageant.

"I think I just want some toast and a glass of milk," she said, half frowning. "I'm not that hungry, either."

"You haven't eaten all day, Trace. And you look green all over."

"I'm fine, I guess I'm just coming down with something." Darlene smiled and nodded, taking their menus away. Penny began to ramble on and on about possible presents besides just the shoes. Tracy lowered her chin to her fist and stared at Penny. She nodded occasionally as Penny rambled. The girl was in love. It was normally very cute, but for some reason, Tracy was just completely nauseated today. The food arrived and Penny wasted no time tearing into her hamburger. Tracy sipped on her milk, but as Penny devoured her food, Tracy soon found herself scrambling to get to the bathroom as she relieved herself of everything she had ingested.

"Ready to go to the hospital now?" Penny asked from the other side of the bathroom door. Tracy groaned her approval.

When Tracy and Penny walked out of the diner, Tracy backed out on going to the doctor.

"You've been so cute about this shopping trip. We've got to pick something up!"

"Seaweed won't mind. You're sick, Tracy!"

"No. We're getting him something, and we're getting Link something, and that is that!" she said.

Only... that wasn't exactly that.

With the new PF Flyers wrapped up in brown paper and topped off with an awkward bow, Penny and Tracy were in search of the right gift for Link. Tracy had thought about buying him a novelty comb that unsnapped like a switchblade knife. It seemed too cheap and not thoughtful enough. Though she understood that Link was not the shallow teen he was when they'd first bumped into each other, she still couldn't stifle the feeling that nothing seemed good enough for him. He hardly asked for anything to begin with, and when she did spoil him with a surprise it was always with a new shirt or a new tie or some other piece of clothing for work. She had bought him cologne once, but she hated the way it smelled on him, so he had given it away. His natural smell, a light tint of sweat, his soap, and the scent of Ultra Clutch Hairspray were all she liked on him. Tracy almost swooned thinking of Link. Penny had been speaking to her, but she hadn't been paying attention.

"Yeah," she said absentmindedly.

"How far along do you think you are?"

"What?"

"You know... how pregnant are you?"

"Pregnant?" Tracy shrieked. Two older ladies walking by gasped and shook their heads. They walked away complaining about the terrible language of progressive youths.

"Shh!" Penny said, wrapping an arm around Tracy and using one gloved hand as an indicator that she should lower her voice.

"What do you mean by that?"

"You haven't been paying attention all day. You're forgetting things and spacing out. You've been getting sick. You're nauseous. You passed out because you didn't eat!"

"So?" she scoffed, trying to make light of the situation.

"So I think you need to see if there's a little Link growing inside of you, that's what's so!"

"How do you know so much about this anyway?"

"Don't be naive, Tracy. Just because they didn't teach it in school doesn't mean Maybelle hasn't made it a point to drill it into me and Seaweed so much that for a while he was afraid to even dance too close! Remember?"

"I remember... you're not... are you?"

"Please. Tracy, of course we are."

"Penny! You're not married!"

"I'm not black, either. I don't exactly think inside the box when it comes to my relationship." Tracy laughed at this, and Penny joined her. "Look, they're going to be rolling up the streets eventually. I think we need to find out for sure if you're pregnant or if you're sick. Either way, a doctor has to be involved, okay?"

"Sure," she whispered.

(Earlier that day)

When Link answered the phone, Seaweed was excitedly filling his friend in on the present he wanted to get for Penny for Christmas. He'd asked if Link wanted to join him. Link's brow creased as he heard Tracy in the bathroom.

"Yeah," he said absentmindedly into the phone.

"Great! Because Penny should be almost to your house, and I don't want her to know we're going out right now."

"We?" he asked, his finger wrapping around the coiled phone cord.

"You're such a kidder, Link! I'll be there in ten minutes, so be ready!" Link sighed. What had he gotten himself into? The moment the phone clattered to the receiver he heard banging on his front door. Knowing it would be Penny, he swung the door open.

"Seriously, shirt!" she said, throwing her hands up to cover her view of Link's chest.

"Good to see you too, Pens," he said, turning around and walking into his bedroom. Penny shut the door behind herself and began pacing on the spot. Link pulled on a plain white shirt he'd worn the day before and had thrown at the foot of the bed. It was fine while Penny was

here, and then he would be dressing for his super-secret shopping trip. Link had decided to forgo traditional Christmas gift giving in lieu of shutting out the world for a three day Link and Tracy in home mini vacation. There would be wine, bubble baths, massages, and most importantly, the phone would be unplugged. There would be no bother for them from the outside world. He had ordered fine Belgium chocolates and assorted cheeses that he couldn't find in town, things he and Tracy had tried a couple of years before when he was on the road singing. He was away from the studio for Christmas and had instructed his employers he would not be returning until the second week of January. He deserved to relax. Tracy had still been working, creating dance moves and picking up shifts where Seaweed worked while they weren't travelling. The best of the "Nicest Kids" had been picked up along with Corny Collins to travel the country dancing and singing. A new album was about to be recorded to precede next year's summer tour.

"Little darlin'?" Link asked through the bathroom door. "Is everything alright in there? Penny's here."

"Yeah Link, I'm fine," she said. Link's brow creased. He should tell her she couldn't go. He should go out and tell Penny that there would be no way that he, as a responsible husband, would allow his wife to go out in the cold while she was sick. Link nodded to himself, ready to enforce his decision when Tracy walked out of the bathroom. She looked absolutely beautiful. She lifted her hair with her arms and looked at him over her shoulder. She was so gorgeous. Link hadn't heard a word she said, but when she lifted her hair from the nape of her neck, he allowed the context clues to fill him in. He gripped the zipper and tugged upward and then fastened the little button. Unable to help himself, he leaned down and kissed the back of her neck. Tracy turned around and beamed at him. She leaned up on her tip toes and gave him a soft kiss that he had been tempted to explore. Tracy broke the kiss leaving Link a little disappointed. He was unable to help his next statement, but sensing something had to be wrong, he couldn't help himself.

"Be careful, okay?" he asked.

"Of course!" she promised. As soon as her back was turned, Link spied her rear end sashaying away. He raised an eyebrow and then reached out and grabbed it. He heard her gasp and he could not help but laugh. She looked over her shoulder and made a funny face at him in retort. Link simply offered her a blown kiss. Tracy caught it in the air and saved it for later. Penny showed up behind her and ripped his lovely sweetheart out of the doorway.

"Bye Link!" Penny yelled. Link wrinkled his nose at her. He could hear them chatting as they scuttled out of the house. Link walked over to the window and waited for a moment. When he saw Tracy walk out of the front of their apartment, he turned from the window, drew the blinds, and prepared for Seaweed's arrival.

Seaweed ran late, but it was alright to Link. It gave him time to rest a little longer. He hadn't slept well, watching Tracy toss and turn and moan and groan for a little over an hour before she woke up. He couldn't stop himself from worrying. He should cancel on Seaweed. He should find Penny and Tracy and take Tracy to see the doctor.

Link hadn't realized he'd fallen asleep until he was roused by a banging on his door. He stood up from the couch and answered the door. He grinned at Seaweed, who immediately went into the strange song and dance handshake they'd made up together. It was probably pretty lame by most people's standards, but most people didn't have the capacity to make their bodies move in the ways that they did.

"So what's this great gift you've decided on at the last minute?" Link asked, walking with Seaweed to his car.

"You gon' flip, man. I'd rather you be sitting."

"Nah, go on, you can tell me!"

"I'm finally asking Penny to be my wife!... Link?... Link!"

"What? How'd I get on the ground?" he asked.

"Man some crazy kid came by throwing snowballs with rocks in 'em. He hit the side of my car and hit you between the eyes. It's alright, a cop happened by. You okay, man?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," he said, rubbing his forehead and sitting up. Seaweed reached down and helped him up.

"So did you ever tell me what the gift was?"

"He hit you pretty good. Get in. I don't need you passing out on me again!"

"Yeah, alright," he said, sliding into the passenger side door of the car. He sprawled out against the window. "Well?"

"I'm asking Penny to marry me!" he said excitedly.

"Woah, way to go, man! Took you long enough!"

"Hey, your raging hormones raced your wedding."

"Your girlfriend wasn't exactly withholding. You wouldn't understand."

"I understand that the best things in life are worth waiting for. I've bought us a house down town."

"Where all the white folks live?"

"Yeah man. They've got some pretty cool folks down there. They loved us on the Corny Collins show, and they invited me into the neighborhood with open arms."

"That's unbelievable."

"That's what I thought, too. But anyway man, you know, I was waiting 'till everything was perfect. I didn't want to jump the gun in any fashion- not that you did!"

"I didn't!"

"Exactly! So I wanted to have the car- tada! And the house," he said, flashing the key, "And now all I need is to ask her to marry me."

"I couldn't be happier for you, man!"

"Thanks. And thanks for coming with me to pick out a ring. You're gonna be my best man, right?"

"As if you ever had a doubt."

"Sweet, Cracker boy! Let's roll!" Link smiled at his friend as they drove to the opposite side of town.

"You don't think that I did the wrong thing by Tracy with getting an apartment first do you? I mean, I don't know where she wants to live. We obviously won't be there forever."

"Nah, man... you did the right thing because you know the girls are going to want to live close together. Now that you know where Penny and I are gonna be, it will be a matter of time before Tracy starts in with all those little hints about moving."

"I figured they'd want to be close. I loved California when we were out there, but everything about Baltimore says home to me, you know?"

"Run and tell that!" he smirked. The thought brought Link back to the day he'd first met his new best friend. They had both grown so much. Times had definitely changed. "I've got to level with you though, man," he said, turning into a parking space beside the jewelry store and pulling to a stop. He put the car into park, killed the engine, and then turned to face his friend. "I'm pretty concerned about how things are escalating in Vietnam. I don't put it past them to draft us."

"Nah, man, we ain't goin' to war."

"But as a patriotic citizen could you really not do your duty?"

"I'd have to. It'd be shameful not to fight for my country, or for Tracy," he drew his brow pensively.

"Exactly my point. That's why I've been workin' non-stop. I needed to make sure my girl would be taken care of. She'll have a house and car and money, just in case."

"In case what, Seaweed?" Link asked.

"Come on!" he said excitedly. "Let's get in there and find my baby a ring!"

"Seaweed, wait-" Link said, but Seaweed had gotten out of the car and slammed the door behind himself. Link sighed and laid his head against the back of the seat. He got out of the car and followed his friend inside.

"... but we have a strict colored policy. I'm sure you understand."

"Yeah! I understand! You don't want my money!" Seaweed said. He

turned around to see Link had just walked in.

"Did you hear that, man?"

"No, what's going on?" he asked.

"Man, forget these clowns, let's roll!"

"Seaweed?" Link asked, following his friend out of the store. Link climbed into the car beside his friend. Seaweed slammed his palms against his steering wheel as angry tears flooded his eyes.

"Look, man, I can take the money and run in..."

"Aw but no!" he growled, throwing his hands up in the air. "My money ain't good enough for them out of my hands, it ain't good enough for them at all. I just... I don't know where else I'll be able to get a ring at such short notice without going out of town. Do you?" he asked Link, but Link shook his head in the negative. "I've been dreaming about the way I'd ask and the way her face would light up. Now what am I going to do for Christmas?"

"Propose with the house key."

"Are you for real?"

"Yeah, man. Ask her to marry you, but present the house key."

"Penny's too classy-"

"Penny? Classy?""

"Hey, watch yourself talking about my woman, man!"

"I didn't mean it that way. I meant that Penny isn't the type of girl you have to go out of your way to impress. You swept her off her feet from the get go. Rescuing her from her deranged mother kind of cemented things for her I think."

Seaweed sighed. "Yeah, but you know, it's such a disappointment to think things are still the way they are. Maybe I shouldn't have bought our house where I did."

"Things change one step at a time. It's nice there. And your neighbors already like you, yeah?"

"I'm just wondering how long it will be before we're driven out."

"Please, with women like Penny and Tracy there? It will never happen."

"What if we had kids, though?"

"Children?"

"Yeah." Seaweed said, and something clicked in Link's brain. The thought of having children with his wife was beautiful. Warmth swelled in his chest and he realized it was something that he would

be perfectly okay with. "What's with that weird look on your face?"

"What? Nothing!"

Seaweed's smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "What were you thinkin' just then."

"I was- I was thinking about a baby. With Tracy."

"Better be with Tracy!" Seaweed joked. He eyed the stupid grin on his friend's face. He kind of felt the same way on the inside. He wondered how dark or light his and Penny's kids would turn out. Whatever the case, he hoped that they wouldn't suffer injustices and inequality. He frowned for a second but wiped it away before his friend could see. He didn't want to bring down Link's day with a bummer. "Wanna go see the house?" he asked, and Link nodded.

/A/N/

Hm... so I wonder what will happen next? A good chunk of the next part is finished, and this will probably be a three or four parter. I'm like 4 years too late to jump on the bandwagon, but I hope someone out there is enjoying these as much as I am enjoying writing them. :)

## 2. Chapter 2

Again, I don't own hairspray or the characters. Also, huge thanks to my first (and only) reviewer, H6p8Gv! :) And now, for the story!

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Talking to the doctor hadn't been as scary as Tracy thought it would be. Penny was in the waiting room. Tracy swung her stubby legs off the side of a very uncomfortable bed.

"Alright, Mrs. Larkin!" Amber said, grinning. "The doctor will be in touch! Say hi to Link, Penny and Seaweed for me, okay?" she asked. Tracy smiled brightly back at Amber. No one had expected Amber to turn in her dancing shoes for nursing, but she had. According to her, the lack of nurturing from her obtuse mother had driven her to reach out to others. As she matured she realized that helping others was something she could do well and something she could feel good about. There was never any bitterness in her tone when she spoke to the girl who had turned her whole sheltered world upside down. Amber had confessed to Tracy before when they had run into each other at the grocery store, that she had indeed loved Link. She had said that she had loved him and let him go, and that she realized it was best for her to move on. She had tried apologizing for being cruel, especially in school, but Tracy would hear none of it. She credited Amber for her marriage and for her friendship with Seaweed. Amber had been relieved. Though she and Tracy had never exactly been friends, the bond between them had continued to grow upon each new meeting.

Tracy thanked Amber and went back into the waiting room where Penny was crunching on her lollipop.

"Well?" she asked, jumping up from her chair. Tracy chuckled. "We've got to wait for the results. I'll call you as soon as I know. Don't forget Seaweed's gift!" she said. Penny smiled sheepishly and ran back to her chair. She scooped up Seaweed's present, and she and Tracy went home.

"It's the works!" Link said in awe as he took in the bare living room. The golden hardwood floors shone yellow warmth back at him. The walls were all completely and perfectly white.

"I'm kind of thinking she's going to paint around here, but for now I really like the way it is. Can't you see it, Link? Television over there, big couch here, romantic loveseat," he gestured with his hands, "right here. Just big enough for Mr. and Mrs. Stubbs."

"What of the children?" Link joked.

"They'll have a whole couch. All seven of them!"

"Seven? Have you talked to the woman who has to give live birth to all seven of those imaginary children?"

"We're still negotiating."

"Ah, and what number are you stuck on."

"Eh, well, you know, it's just a teeny difference."

"Seaweed..."

"Alright, two. Just two. What am I going to do with just two kids?"

"You're going to be thankful you retained your hair and your sanity."

"But what if it's two boys or two girls? I want at least one of each."

"By the sound of it, you want seven. What if six are boys?"

"The seventh would be a guaranteed girl or we'd just stop there."

"How generous of you," his friend joked, and Seaweed chuckled.

"You're a jerk," he said. Link continued to survey the house. He really could see his friends living here and their potential children playing all over the house. He could also see himself and Tracy in a quaint neighborhood like this one. He could hear the birds chirping outside and he could envision summer barbecues, even though the yard was filled with small snow drifts. He imagined himself and Tracy and their children making snowmen. There would be, however, no snowball fights. He winced as his forehead throbbed again at the thought.

"You can see it, can't you?" Seaweed asked. Link raised a questioning

eyebrow. "You can see yourself here. You can see you and her and the kids all here."

"I can," Link admitted.

"There's a house for sale just two doors down. I know we wouldn't be next door neighbors, but maybe a little space would be good. Anyway, if you were going to wait and you just had to be right by me, the house to our right is going up for sale after Christmas."

"You serious?"

"Mhmm. I'm not exactly sure why, but I'm trying not to take it personally."

"Personally?"

"Some people think if a negro moves in that everything is suddenly worth less. Like we devalue the area. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth."

"Really? Tastes pretty good to me. It spares us from having to live around bigots." Link smiled and Seaweed smiled back.

"You alright, Link Larkin."

"You too, bud," he said, smiling.

"Don't do that creepy wink thing at me. That only works on girls and the sensitive male." Link broke into a cackle. "You almost did it, didn't you? You almost did the wink!"

"Shut up!" Link said, playfully shoving his friend.

"C'mon, let's see if we can get a halfway decent view of their backyard. Man, we could tear down this divisive fence and just have one huge backyard for the kids to share." Link smiled at his friend, losing himself in the thought of watching their potential children play together in their yards. He couldn't think of anything more wonderful.

"I guess shoes will have to be good enough," Penny frowned.

"Why are you stressing over what to give him so much?"

Penny sighed and shook her head. "We've been together for four years. Four whole years. I used to feel like I didn't need official validation like you and Link have butâ€"

"You're worried that he hasn't popped the question."

"Yeah. I wonder if he's serious. I wonder if he loves me at all?"

"Penny! That's ridiculous!"

"That's easy to say for you Mrs. Larkin," Penny sneered. Tracy stared down at her hands as they walked. The snow crunched beneath her feet and the sound made her realize she still hadn't eaten but that she really wanted to.

"You hungry?" she asked.

"Duh!" Penny exclaimed.

"Want to grab a late lunch?"

"Yeahâ€| can we hit up that diner by the shoe shop? They have awesome chicken." Tracy nodded. The women entered the restaurant and sat in a corner booth. A waitress served them menus and smiles. Tracy was ravenous, but she was worried that she might lose her food again if she wasn't careful. When the waitress returned, Tracy ordered first.

"Dry toast, milk-"

"Tracy!" Penny exclaimed.

"I'm not finished, I promise! I also want your country fried chicken, white gravy and french fries instead of mashed potatoes and a side of whatever vegetable you like best."

"Oh! I want the same thing except I want double fries, no veggies and a slice of apple pie and a chocolate maltedâ€| oh, and not the toast and milk part."

"Coming right up!" the waitress said.

"You sure you'll eat that?" Penny asked, staring hungrily at the ketchup. Tracy giggled. Her friend had always been one to put a lot of food away. It had bothered Tracy when they were younger, but because of Link she no longer cared.

"No, but I can try. That's what the toast is for. If I am really pregnant, I've got to do something for my little one. I could no more deny anything to Link than I could any part of him." Tracy's face turned soft, her eyes turned downward. Penny thought Tracy looked a lot like a painting that some dead old guy from about a bajillion years ago would have painted. She looked beautiful. The waitress silently slipped between them and placed down their drinks.

"You're positively glowing." Penny smiled at her friend. Tracy looked up at Penny. She was so thankful to have such a wonderful best friend.

"Who would leave these two stone cold foxes by themselves?" Seaweed asked. Penny perked up and beamed at him. Seaweed leaned in for a soft kiss. Tracy saw Link smiling beside him. She smiled back.

"Two of the biggest fools in the world. Who else could leave such beauty unchecked?" Link asked, leaning down in the booth to brush his lips to Tracy's.

"What are you guys doing here?" Penny asked. Seaweed wrapped his arm around her shoulder.

"We were in the neighborhood and decided it was time to eat something. Fancy running into the two finest chicks in town!" Link waved the waitress over. He took Tracy's hand in his. She rubbed their hands with her other hand.

"Sweetheart," he said softly in her ear. "Your hands are so cold."

"I'm fine, don't worry so much," she whispered back. Link started to give her a look, but the waitress saved Tracy from further scrutiny.

"What'll it be, gents?" she asked, handing over two menus.

"What're you havin' babe?" Seaweed asked Penny. After she had given him the run down, Seaweed laughed. "I'll just have a burger and an iced tea. She can share her fries."

"You sure about that? " Penny asked.

"Yeah, you love me," he said. Penny smiled back at him.

"So a burger all the way. And you?" she gestured at Link with her pencil.

"Coke, Burger, no mayo and fries," he said. The waitress scribbled, gave both the young men a nod, accepted their menus and walked away. Link took a sip of Tracy's milk while he waited for his drink.

"So you said you guys just happened to be in the neighborhood. What were you really doing out together three days before Christmas?" Penny asked. Seaweed smiled.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" he asked. Tracy frowned and Link raised an eyebrow at her.

"Trace?" he asked softly as Penny and Seaweed continued their conversation alone.

"I'm fine," she said, but she avoided his gaze.

"Swear to me," he said. Tracy smiled at him. She placed her hand on the side of his face and he almost shivered. Screw the no gift thing. She was at least getting gloves.

"I swear to you, Link Larkin, with all of my heart, that nothing at all is wrong with me." Link smiled accepting of her answer. Tracy's left hand absentmindedly found her stomach and rested there. She wasn't exactly lying to him, but she felt as though she wasn't being truthful. Not that a baby was wrong, and she knew he wanted to start a family, but when they had agreed he had specifically used the word "someday". Was it already someday? Was it too soon for someday for Link?

General conversations about the weather, funny anecdotes and stories about shopping continued until the food arrived. Link and Seaweed shared a look at one point. The nonverbal communication said everything; The girls were not to know about the incident at the jewelry shop, and not just because the engagement was to be a surprise.

The couples ate their food, passing and sharing and accepting bites of food and jabs and teases from one another. The delightful conversation brightened the little booth in the corner. The foursome

could have been anywhere on Earth, but nowhere could they have been as happy as they were at the moment, altogether. Tracy was relieved she was able to keep her food down. She found herself ravenous and had even strayed over to Link's plate for some fries and a couple of bites of his burger. Penny had eaten her chicken and half her fries, two bites of pie and half her malted. Seaweed surveyed the mountains of untouched food left behind by Penny.

"I'm just tired," she said, and Seaweed had accepted her answer. After the check was paid, everyone piled into Seaweed's car. Penny rode up front. Link sat in the back with his arms wrapped around Tracy. Penny and Seaweed dropped Tracy and link off at their apartment. They tweeted their horn and waved. Tracy and Link waved back. They went upstairs. Link turned on the furnace while Tracy changed into some warm pajamas. She grabbed a warm blanket and waited on the couch while he changed into some comfortable pjs. They turned on the television and watched programs until the t.v. signed off for the night. The national anthem jolted Tracy awake. Link's head was rolled back on the couch. He was snoring lightly, his mouth agape. Tracy bit her bottom lip to keep from laughing. He was just too precious. She leaned over and began pressing soft kisses all over his face until she roused him. He lifted his head and looked at her, his gaze cockeyed from being woken. His hair was tousled all about his head. Tracy sighed contentedly. He gave her a half smile. He rose from the couch and helped her up. They walked hand in hand to bed. Tracy wondered if she would sleep at all, considering that the anticipation of learning whether she would be a mother or not was weighing so heavily on her. When Link's warm arms wrapped around her from behind as they lay in bed, all fears and stresses melted away. Tracy had found no time to worry when a comfortable sleep quickly whisked her away.

"Penny, please answer," Tracy muttered into the phone. Link and Seaweed had gone for the day, and Tracy had decided to stay in alone. It was a smart move. Amber had called and confirmed what Tracy and Penny had expected; Tracy Edna Turnblad Larkin was expecting a baby. Tracy became frustrated upon her third call of the phone's incessant ringing. Penny couldn't have been home. She was always the first one to jump on a call. Motormouth Maybelle had made light of the situation by gently ribbing Penny that she was after Maybelle's "Motormouth" title.

Tracy jumped with a start when she heard someone banging on her door, their fists slamming with rapid succession. Tracy flung the door open to see an overly excited Penny with eyes as wide as saucers standing there with her arms thrust into the air in a questioning gesture.

"Well?" she exclaimed.

"You're going to be an aunt!" Tracy said, and Penny threw her arms around her best friend and began weeping.

"Does he know yet?" she asked, referring to Link.

"You and Amber and the doctor are the only ones who know."

"Yeah, the Amber part is still creepy to me. She still gets under my skin."

"Amber has changed, Penny. And you can't judge her any more than she judges you, which is not at all. So drop it."

"Ouch, Tracy," Penny frowned.

"I'm sorry, Penny. I guess my hormones have me snapping."

"It's cool. So where's daddy?"

"He and your man have gone out for the day."

"Do you think they're stepping out on us?"

"Don't be silly, Penny! Seaweed only has eyes for you! I'm not worried!"

"No, I'm not worried they're stepping out with other women," Penny joked.

"Sure, our men love each other more than us!" Tracy laughed. "You're crazy." Tracy smiled at Penny, but the smile soon faded.

"I still haven't found anything for Link for Christmas, but I think I know what I want to get him."

"Cool. Get ready, I'll go with you." Tracy nodded at her friend. She quickly dressed and the two girls hit the street. People were everywhere, crowding the streets. Last minute shoppers swooped around the women and kept moving like fish swimming around a boulder.

"It could get ugly out here," Tracy said. The women carefully navigated their way to the suit shop. Penny raised an eyebrow.

"This is the only place you ever buy anything for Link."

"I don't know what else to do, Penny. All I can think about is the baby. I'm such a terrible gift giver. I'm an even worse wife."

"Woah, slow down, Tracy! None of that is true."

"But it is, and you're right. Link is so thoughtful and all I ever buy him are ties!" she sobbed, wiping her eyes with the backs of her hands.

"Don't cause a scene, Tracy!" Penny said, rubbing her back in a soothing motion.

"Now I'm causing a scene! Fantastic! Look at Tracy Larkin, everyone! Watch her cry in the street for absolutely no reason!" she bawled. Penny cupped her hand over Tracy's mouth.

"Your hormones have got you acting like a mad woman," Penny said. Tracy tried to talk back, but Penny kept her hand over Tracy's mouth. "You've got to calm down." Tracy blinked away her tears, and Penny released her. "I'm thinking we should walk around for a while and see what we can't see, okay?" Penny and Tracy walked around the area stopping into shops but never really seeing anything they wanted until Tracy found herself pressed to a shop front glass.

"I've found it, Penny!" she said reverently. "It's absolutely perfect!"

"I don't think it's Link's size."

"No, for the baby!"

"Your baby who won't be here for several months and will probably get here in time for summer." Penny said. Tracy shot her an evil glare, and Penny threw her hands up. "Just being realistic here!" Tracy sighed.

"I know. I'm not even sure he will be happy about this baby."

"Of course he will, Tracy."

"You don't understand. We've talked about 'someday' so much. I wonder if it's finally here?"

"You don't really have a choice in the matter now, do you?"

"No."

"Link has surprised you before, hasn't he? You fell in love with his face, but then you got to know him. That's when you leaned what love was really about."

"That was deep, Penny."

"Thanks!" she said, swirling her lolly around her mouth.

"The problem is, I haven't been pregnant this whole time, you know, for months now anyway. I could have at any time started looking for gifts."

"You were all very busy. Besides, beating yourself up for the past isn't going to help with our current predicament. Just think Tracy."

"I have been. Honestly, my head is kind of stuck hearing the same song over and over. 'Love, love me do! You know I love you! I'll always be true. So pleeeeaseâ€¢ love me do, oh love me do!', she sang and Penny joined her at the end. "That's it, Penny!" she exclaimed. "Link has been singing that new song by The Beatles for days now! I can buy him the single!"

"That's a swell idea, Tracy!"

"Not as nice of a gift as those shoes you bought for Seaweed."

"Honestly, I'm pretty sure he'll be relieved you didn't buy him an article of clothing for once." Tracy poked Penny in the ribs. "Ouch!" she exclaimed. Both women laughed. They locked arms and headed for the one place they knew would have every record there was to hear-Motormouth Maybelle's Record Shop.

Tracy's eyes slowly slid open. She had been so excited about Christmas morning that she hadn't remembered falling asleep. She could feel Link's arms wrapped around her from behind. It was cold in the bedroom but almost too hot for comfort under their blankets. Tracy sneezed, jarring herself backward into her snoozing husband. Her face scrunched in apologetic worry. She hoped she had not roused him. A soft snort indicated she had indeed.

"Bless you," he whispered. "Merry Christmas."

"Thank you," she whispered back. "I'm going to go make you some breakfast."

"No. I want you to lay right here," he said, pulling her closer to his chest. "I don't want to leave this bed all day." Tracy felt her stomach rumble. She swallowed hard, hoping it would calm down. Link rested his head above hers,

"Please let me go," she whispered.

"Never."

"I'm going to be sick."

"What?" he asked, releasing her and sitting up. Tracy had disappeared into the bathroom. Link frowned. So much for their wonderful Christmas vacation from the world. His wife would be too sick to enjoy herself. All he had gotten her was a stupid pair of gloves. What a stupid idea. He should have bought her something better and not worried about holing up for three days. There goes the rest of his gift. When Tracy was sick, she didn't like to be touched, she didn't want to be spoken to. She wanted to rest and drink chicken broth until she got better. Link was the opposite. He wanted Tracy to hold him the whole time. There was something about her touch. He never wanted to do without it. Link frowned and rolled out of bed. He made the bed up and slipped into his slippers and housecoat. He rubbed his hands together and blew warm air into them. He started to go to the furnace, but he detoured by the bathroom door.

"Sweetheart?" he asked. "Trace?"

"I'm fine," she said, though her voice had taken on an echo. She definitely had her head over the commode. He left her alone. He turned up the furnace and then went to the kitchen and began preparing breakfast. He hated cooking for just himself, but maybe she would try the delicious waffles with fruit compote and whipped cream he had planned for their breakfast. He put on a couple of pieces of chicken to boil, just in case she would only take broth. By the time Link had finished making breakfast, Tracy was waiting for him in the living room. Much to his relief, she looked rejuvenated. He slid a plate in front of her.

"I'm going to get us some milk," he said, leaning in to kiss her cheek. Her breath smelled minty. She must have just brushed. Link walked back into the kitchen, prepared two glasses of milk and returned just in time to see Tracy enjoying the last bite of her first waffle. He grinned from ear to ear.

"They're perfect, Link! Thank you!"

"Anything, little darlin', " he said. "This is just the first gourmet meal of many. For the next three days, we are shutting out the whole world. No phone, no visitors, nothin'. I'm going to pamper you. I just want to spend time with you."

"Link," she sighed dreamily, and then frowned. Of course his gift was amazing.

"Oh, and one more thing," he said, reaching under their Christmas tree." He handed Tracy the package. "I see there's one for me, too!" he said, snatching it up and plopping down on the couch.

"My hands are so cold I can barely open this!" she said, tearing away the paper. Inside the box was a pair of black gloves lined with fur. "Perfect!" she exclaimed, pulling them on. "They're so warm! You always know just what I need. Gloves, perfect breakfasts," she whimpered, her lip trembling as she began to break down. She ripped off the gloves and tossed them down on the couch. Link's eyebrows creased in concern. "You deserve a better wife. You deserve someone who deserves to be treated like this!" she sniffled.

"What?" Link asked. Tracy got up from the couch and walked out of the room. He could hear their bedroom door slam closed, quickly followed by their bathroom door. Link frowned. He set down his gift and followed Tracy. The bedroom door opened, but the bathroom door was locked. "Trace?" he asked through the door. "Pleaseâ€|"

"Link you deserve so much better than some stupid record!"

"You got me a record?" he asked, smiling.

"I can't believe I ruined that, too!" she sobbed.

"Tracy, stop this, now," he said, his voice becoming serious. "Open the door. Don't make me break it down. I don't deserve to be locked away from my wife." The door clicked open. Her eyes were soft and red. Tears stained her cheeks. Link wrapped his arms around her, helpless as she cried. When she calmed down, he pulled her away and looked down at her. "Darlin', you've got to tell me what's going on. I deserve to know." Link pulled her to the couch in the front room. Tracy sat down. She picked her gloves up and began fidgeting with them.

"I don't know how to sayâ€|"

"You can tell me anything, Trace. I love you!"

"Link, Iâ€| Linkâ€|" she paused. "Link, you're going to be a daddy." Link's concern melted away. His expression was replaced with relief and then excitement.

"Are you saying what I think you're saying? You're kidding! Really? This is amazing!" he said and grabbed Tracy. He hugged her tightly and then released her. "Don't want to squish our babyâ€| How long have you known? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Just a couple days. I thought you'd be mad at me."

"Mad? Are you kidding?"

"Well, you said you wanted kids \_someday\_, "

"Yeah, when we graduated. I didn't want kids then, but they're pretty much all I've been thinking about lately."

"You have?"

"Well, yeah! When Seaweed and I went to the house he bought Penny forâ€¦ oh man, I wasn't supposed to tell you."

"He bought her a house?"

"Yeah."

"That's incredible!"

"Ain't it?"

"Not quite what she was expecting, but I'm sure she'll be happy."

"Who would expect a house?"

"Maybe someone who already had a ring." Link sighed.

"Babe, he couldn't get her a ring, but it isn't his fault. We tried. He's still going to propose to her."

"You knew all this and we're having a no phone calls or visitors weekend?"

"Wellâ€¦"

"Link, I can't not talk to Penny!"

"I thought maybe they should have some alone time, too," he said. Tracy melted when she saw the look of disappointment that crossed his face.

"This means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

"I was kind of hoping it would mean a lot to you, too."

"It does-

"Yeah," he said. "You know, Trace, I'm not really hungry. I'm going back to bed. Why don't you go to Penny's."

"Link-

"Go, Trace."

"You don't want me here?"

"Of course I do, Tracy! I wanted you here to myself for three days. Three measly days, and I'm a bad husband for that."

"I never said that."

"Well you're acting like it! Tracy we spend all of our time on the road or with other people. I hardly ever have you to myself. I understand that Penny is about to see her dreams come to fruition. Maybe they need to spend a little time alone, too. For goodness sakes, Tracy, I just found out you're pregnant. I kind of want to soak that in, just the two of us. Of course, I'm sure Penny knew before me anyway. Might as well be her baby," he snapped. Link stormed into the kitchen. He set his plate on the table and grabbed the edges feeling his anger flow. Tracy's soft sobbing in the other room disarmed him. Link sighed and ran a hand over his face. He cursed softly. This wasn't the holiday he wanted. Link shuffled quietly back into the living room. When he wrapped his arms around Tracy, he expected her to be angry or to shove him away, but she pulled him closer. He kissed the top of her head willing himself not to cry.

"Have things gotten so bad?" she asked into his shirt.

"No sweetheart. Everything is fine I just..." he trailed off. Tracy nodded into his chest as if she understood what he meant to say. She pulled away. He wiped the remaining tears from her cheeks with the pad of his thumb and he smiled at her. "I love you Tracy Edna Turnblad Larkin." She smiled brightly. She leaned up and he leaned down and shared a sweet kiss with her. "And I love baby Larkin," he said, resting his left hand on her tummy. Tracy giggled and Link sighed.

"I appreciate all your efforts. Today would have been wonderful if I weren't so emotional."

"I disagree. You're emotional because of our little one. Now I don't have to booze you up and take advantage of you."

"Link Larkin!" she shrieked and then giggled.

"We've already started our little family. Who could ask for anything more?"

"Well, I know it isn't much, but you still haven't opened your gift." Link reluctantly released Tracy. He slid his hands over the brown paper wrapping.

"I know it's a record, but I kind of have my hopes up." he said, slowly tearing the paper. "The Beatles! How did you know?" he asked. He gave Tracy a chaste kiss on the lips. "Thank you, baby!"

"You've only been singing that song forever now," she said. Link smirked at her. He ran over to the record player and put his new record on. The music filled the room. Link extended his hand to Tracy.

"Wife, baby, may I have this dance?" he asked. Tracy graciously accepted his invitation.

A/N Sorry if the page breaks don't show up. It edits them out or some reaosn. Hope you liked this chapter. The next chapter will be very Penny and Seaweed heavy.

A/N Don't own Hairspray, not making money off this. Just enjoying expanding an already awesome universe with my brain juice. I'd like to personally thank the new followers and the two reviewers I've had thusfar. I honestly didn't expect a single one, so I already feel like I've hit the jackpot. :) Okay, so this next piece is very seaweed and penny heavy but this world still revolves around Trink. To be honest, when I write there are very few details I know in advance, so the story writes itself. Hope you guys enjoy. Oh, and one last thing, the page breaks always disappear, sorry about that!

/./

December 25

"Penny? Pennnnnyâ€|. " a soft voice cooed. Penny snorted and rolled over, blinking her eyes rapidly. Inez smiled at her and Penny jumped. Inez laughed and then Penny joined her.

"I thought you'd be Seaweed?"

"You hoped I'd be Seaweed!" Inez chuckled. "He and mom are waiting in the dining room. Mom said we gotta have breakfast before we can open our gifts."

"Hmmmâ€| I'd rather just sleep through breakfast."

"She ain't gonna let you, and you know it! It's too cold to have water thrown on you."

"Fine," Penny grunted. She rolled out of bed, got dressed and met everyone in the dining room. "Mornin' Ms. Maybelle, Inez," her eyes drifted over to Seaweed. "Seaweed? I'm not sure if it's possible but you look about as pale as me!"

"What?" he asked, not really paying attention. Penny frowned. She took her usual seat beside him, but he seemed so distant. What if he was getting bored with her? She could never go back home. Everyone had disowned her, not that she wanted to go back. Tracy and Link were expecting a baby. It would be awkward to stay here if he broke up with her. She imagined him bringing home another woman. A shiver took her from deep inside.

"You okay?" Maybelle asked, and Penny nodded. Her eyes drifted over to Seaweed. Penny leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah," he said quickly. It was cold in the dining room but Seaweed was sweating profusely. She tried to take his hand under the table. For the first time ever, he withdrew it from her. It was covered in sweat. He wiped it on his pajama bottoms. Penny frowned, panic filling her chest.

"I'm not really hungry, Ms. Maybelle," she lied. She stood up from the table. Before Maybelle could protest, Seaweed jumped up quickly.

"Me neither. I'm going to go for a ride, and Penny you should come,"

he said. Penny looked at Maybelle. She had a sly smile on her face. Would she be happy to be rid of Penny? Penny had been living in her care for four years. She frowned.

"Go get dressed now, it's cold outside!" Maybelle said.

"Meet me at the car," Seaweed said dryly. He turned away from her. Penny fought the tears that sprang up. If he were so foolish as to throw away the best thing that ever happened to him, then so be it. Penny would live on the corner in a box, or worse; she would live at Tracy's and Link would resent her.

Penny took her time getting dressed. Her eyes drifted forlornly around the room as she finished. Heavy fists pounded impatiently on her door. Penny answered just as Seaweed was raising his fist again. She gasped. Seaweed's face adopted an apologetic look for a moment but then it was gone.

"Come on," he said. Penny shoved her hands into her pockets and followed. Seaweed usually opened her door when they went somewhere, but this time he didn't. He slid into the driver's seat and cranked the car. They pulled out of their comfortable and familiar northside neighborhood and began driving south further and further into whiter neighborhoods. \_He doesn't even consider me good enough to be kicked out into his own neighborhood. He must think I'm like a cat, that I'll beg for scraps at his door!\_ Penny lamented. The homes in the area were nice, but she wasn't exactly a brand new baby. You couldn't drop a penniless checkerboard chick off at someone's house and expect much mercy. Penny played with the ends of her scarf. She chanced an occasional look at Seaweed. He constantly removed one hand or the other from the steering wheel and dried it on his pant legs.

The homes out the window were becoming slightly shabbier but were still all far more delightful than any she had ever lived in. The car began to roll to a stop in front of a little blue house with white trim. It had a white wrap around porch and a giant oak tree in the front yard. Seaweed put the car into park and he turned to face Penny.

"Penny- "

"Are you breaking up with me?"

"What?"

"Don't think I haven't noticed your behavior as of late. You've been all sweaty andâ€¦ and gone! And you won't hold my hand and- what are you smiling about?" she grumped as Seaweed's face broke into a virtual sunbeam.

"Baby, I'm not here to dump you. You're my girl," he said taking her hands in his.

"Oh thank God!" she said, flinging herself across the car into his arms. "I thought you were trying to get rid of me!"

"Are you crazy? I risk my life every time I kiss you in public. You're a lady worth fighting for."

"You really mean that, don't you?" she asked, pulling away and

staring into his eyes.

"Yeah, Penny. Everything I do, it's always for you, girl!"

"What was that look your mama gave me then?"

"It killed her to keep the secret, but I'm here to give you your Christmas present!" he said, spinning her around in the seat. She leaned her back against his chest and he pointed out the passenger window.

"Did you get me a job as a maid for these people or something?" she asked. Seaweed burst into laughter.

"Naw, baby! That's your house."

"My house?"

"Yeah," he said, his voice softening. Penny spun around in the seat and stared quizzically at him. "Baby, that's your house that can't nobody ever make you leave. You get to say who comes and goes. Forever and ever as long as you want to be there, it is yours."

"Justâ€| mine?"

"Well, upon a condition, really. I'd like you to share that house with me. Penny Pingleton, I want you to be my wedded wifeâ€| Penny?" he asked, but Penny had fainted where she sat. Penny woke to Seaweed stroking her face gently.

"Did I just hallucinate?", she asked. He sat up and pulled her into a seated position.

"Don't pass out on me again," he chuckled, delighted that he still had such an effect on her even after all of the time they'd spent together.

"That's our house. I meant to get you a ring, butâ€|" he looked down at his hands.

"It isn't your fault," she said, understanding what he was going to say. It was common for him to become sad now and then. Penny's outlet was anger. Seaweed was so good at keeping her in check and balancing out her tendency to lash out.

"I was so scared I was losing you. I thought I was losing my only family today."

"Girl you know these peepers are only focused on the prize," he said, leaning in for a kiss. "Now come on and let's go look at our house!"

"I can't wait to call Tracy!" Penny exclaimed.

"Wait, sweetie, about thatâ€|" Seaweed said, but Penny had already bolted from the car towards her new home.

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Penny sat in her kitchen staring out the window. The grass in the backyard was luscious and green, interspersed with patches of gold. She loved monitoring the slowly shifting patches of sun and shadow through the day. There wasn't much for her to do after work until Seaweed came home. He was the most industrious man she'd ever met. And there was definitely a difference between industrious and always working. Her father had always been working. He was never home, which had driven her mother to insane lengths to desperately keep her only daughter home. What Mrs. Pingleton had never figured out was that if you let something free, it would come back if it was meant to. Her father, though sure to be flitting to different flowers when he was out of town, always came back home. Penny thought that he did it because he felt obligated, not because he ever really loved either of them. And now Penny's mother was home, forever alone, forsaking her only daughter and accepting a travelling salesman husband whenever he would happen to arrive home. That would never be Penny's life. It was true Seaweed never stopped working, but it was because he had so much energy and because he loved doing what he did.

Penny sipped her iced tea, her blue eyes raising to the sky. What she could see of it foretold a storm was on its way. Penny frowned and absent-mindedly rubbed her fingers up and down the side of her glass. Life had been the most perfect dream for the past couple of weeks. She and Seaweed had completely moved in and were almost finished unpacking all of their things. Tracy and Link had come out of hiding a couple of days before, and both of the happy couples planned on celebrating their newfound happiness with dinner at the home of the soon to be marrieds Mr. and Mrs. Seaweed Stubbs.

The gentle whisper of paper passing through the slot of the front door attracted Penny's attention. She walked over to the door and stooped down. She scooped up the stack of letters in one hand. Most of the mail they had been receiving belonged to the previous owners. Penny assumed most of this would, too. Her eyes drifted down to the letter on top. The name Bernard Stubbs was written into the receiving line. Penny knew Seaweed's given name was Bernard, but nobody called him that. Only she, his mother and his sister, and other relatives knew the name. Her eyes drifted to the top left hand corner. Penny dropped her drink. The glass shattered on the floor. Her right hand flew up to her mouth as she tried to stifle the growing scream coming out of her mouth. The letter was from the United States government. Seaweed had been drafted.

"Something's wrong," Link said when he walked through the front door of his apartment and saw the look on his wife's face. Tracy could only nod sadly as her husband stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her. She cried softly. Link tried his hardest to be patient, but the anxiety of the situation was quickly overcoming him. He took a step back from her and lifted her chin with his finger. "Lil' darlin'," he said. Tracy wiped her eyes with the back of her hands.

"It's Seaweed!" she bawled, but couldn't manage anything else. Link jumped into action. He grabbed their coats from the rack and wrapped his arm around his wife.

"We're going over there right now, okay?" he asked, and his wife nodded, sobbing all the way. The drive to Penny and Seaweed's house was stressful. Link hated his wife to ever be upset and there was absolutely nothing he could do short of getting her into the arms of

her best friend to fix it.

When they finally arrived at Penny and Seaweed's home, Tracy ran from the car and Penny ran from the house. The women embraced each other in the front yard, both crying loudly. Link's stomach turned. He was beyond disturbed.

"Please, one of you, you've got to tell me what's going on!" Link pleaded as he approached the women.

"Seaweedâ€œ! he's been drafted," Penny managed to make out before her hands covered her mouth again. Link frowned, wrapping his arms around the women and guiding them inside out of the cold. The tea was still on the floor where it had been dropped. Most of it had dried, but the glass was still in the perfect landing spray. Link set about to cleaning it up, and the women took seats on the couch talking in a mourning garble that Link couldn't understand. He caught the occasionally sobbed word here and there, but for the most part, he couldn't get the jist of the women's conversation.

Link spied the envelope on the countertop. The letter had not been opened so much as it had been ripped out in one swift action. Link read the letter. The words in it made sense, but they seemed surreal. This couldn't be happening to his friend. It happened to his neighbors, his coworkers, regular guys on the street, but his new best friend? Link frowned. And if it happened to himâ€œ! if it happened to his friend Seaweed who mascaraed as this "Bernard Stubbs" then it could happen to an unlucky duck like Lincoln "Link" Larkin.

Link set the letter down. He prepared hot tea for the girls and placed it on the coffee table. He sat in a chair beside the couch and waited. His mind swam with forlorn thoughts as he stared blankly across the room. The shadows indoors shifted. The sky opened up and lightning crackled. The deluge of rain pounded the roof and ran off the porch in loud static splatters. No one heard the front door open. No one heard the soft complaints of a man soaked to the bone trying to remove his socks and shoes. No one heard him shuffle from the front door to the front room, and frankly, Seaweed had barely heard them, the sobbing having long before quieted into whimpers. Seaweed's heart sank into his stomach when he walked into his living room and saw three distraught faces staring back. It was the first time he ever lost his ability to smile. His brow wrinkled, and moments later, Penny had thrown her arms around his neck. He leaned down into her embrace as she sobbed. Moments later, Tracy's arms had encircled them both, and then Link stood awkwardly before the threesome, his head bowed solemnly.

"My mother?" he choked out. "Inez?" Penny tried frantically to speak to him, but the words meant nothing. Seaweed's eyes lifted to Link's.

"You got a letter today. You've been drafted." The words felt like peanut butter stuck to the roof of Link's mouth. Seaweed felt his knees try to buckle, but he had to stand in place or the girls would have fallen with them. This was a big deal. Serving his country, a country that hadn't recognized his rights for most of his life, was a sore enough subject. Serving his country in a war that he was unlikely to return home to had paled him.

"I've got-I need toâ€|" he uttered, and as though she could read his thoughts, Penny pulled Seaweed to the couch and sat beside him, unwilling to let him go. Tracy sat on the loveseat across from them, and Link squeezed in beside her. As the moments passed, Link felt more and more like he and Tracy should leave, but the way it was coming down outside, they would never be able to see too far in front of the car anyway. Link felt like he was about to burst when Seaweed finally piped up. "Well, I'm gonna make us all some dinner!" he said in the most chipper and definitive way. Link and the women stared at him as though he had grown another head.

"Seaweed, are you okay?" Penny asked, suddenly able to find words that weren't choked with salted tears.

"As good as I can be! Look here, girl. If I gotta go, then I'ma go. But I ain't gonna spend my last little time with my favorite people crying about something I can't change." He grinned broadly. It was a bizarre juxtaposition to the hallow-eyed, pale faces in the room. He walked to his kitchen and started busily preparing dinner for the foursome humming the words to one of his favorite songs. Tracy looked at Link with uncertainty. He read her expression and then kissed her on the lips. He got up from the couch and walked into the kitchen with his hands shoved deep in his pockets.

"Y'need some help?" he asked. Seaweed turned around and smiled brightly. Link felt as though he had been punched in the stomach.

"Yeah, cracker boy! Why don't you crunch up those crackers for me? I'm makin' us all a meatloaf. Shouldn't take too long to bake," he said, placing the crackers, a bowl and a rolling pin in front of Link. Link layered the crackers on the table and rolled over them repeatedly. If this was how his friend wanted to deal with his problem, who was he to stop him? Moping around wasn't going to change the fact that Seaweed was going whether they wanted him to or not. Sad faces and hungry stomachs wouldn't keep him from dying in a foreign land. Link began singing along with the song his friend was humming, and before long the two were harmonizing and singing like they usually did when they were together. They peeled potatoes and added spices to the cracker crumbs and mixed ingredients and set the meatloaf in the oven and the potatoes on to boil. Link stopped singing and Seaweed's face went slack when Penny stormed into the room.

"Great that you can be so cheerful and sing like it's Christmas! I didn't know you wanted to leave me. I didn't know you wanted to die."

"Penny?"

"I love you, Bernard Stubbs. And you're leaving. You're going away. And I might never see you again, and this is what you do. You spend your time singing in the kitchen."

"Penny, I-," he began, but she shook her head angrily and ran from the room. He could hear her feet running up the stairs, and he flinched when he heard a door slam. Seaweed sighed and ran a hand through his hair. Tracy looked from one man to another.

"Penny! I'm coming!" she said, chasing after her friend.

"Maybe you should go after her, Seaweed." Link said.

"What good is talking to her when she's mad at me."

"Don't you get it? She isn't mad at you. She's mad this is happening to you and that you're not as freaked out as she is."

"Of course I am, probably more. But I never have been one to let life keep me down. Just because I have to leave doesn't mean I'm gone yet."

"I think she needs to hear that," Link said. Seaweed nodded in agreement. He walked upstairs and found Tracy begging Penny to let her in. He put his hands on her shoulders and flicked his eyes toward the stairs. Tracy nodded in understanding and walked downstairs. Link was waiting for her there.

"Penny?"

"There is nothing you can say to make me open this door." Seaweed thought for a moment and then began to sing.

"\_Wise men say, only fools rush in, but I can't help falling in love with you\_."

"That's not fair."

"\_Shall I stay? Would it be a sin? I can't help falling in love with you\_." Penny opened the door. Her eyes were red rimmed, her cheeks were puffy and her nose was red.

"No fair," she reiterated. Seaweed wrapped his arms around her and kissed her forehead.

"You said there was nothing I could sayâ€|"

"Yeah, and then you sang our song."

"I love you Penny, don't you get it?" he asked, stepping back from her. He searched her eyes and she frowned deeply. "I don't want to be without you! I've always opposed this war, you know that. I barely stand for this country the way they treat me and my people like human shields. But baby, there ain't much I can do. I can't be no draft dodger. There ain't no honor in that. And you know what? You're getting ahead of yourself. I still have to go through a physical and testing and you never know, something might not be good enough for them. They might think I'm too black, even!" he said, grinning broadly. Penny chuckled. "There you go. That's my girl. That's the beautiful smile I fell in love with. Oh yesâ€| the moment I met you Penny Pingleton, I knew my life would never be the same."

"You've never said that before."

"I know," he said, rubbing her arms with his hands. "I want to make sure I have a chance to say everything I need to."

"Oh Seaweed," she said, looking away to weep. Seaweed placed his finger underneath her chin and lifted it so their eyes would meet.

"Penny, if you don't know or remember anything else about me, know that I love you. I loved you from the moment I first laid eyes on you. I loved it when you asked if you, too, could 'check it out,'" he said, raising his voice several octaves in a silly manner to imitate her voice.

"I don't sound like that!"

"No, I can't impersonate you. You're one of a kind. You're my soul mate."

"I love you Bernard."

"I am positively enamored by you, Penny," he said. He rubbed his nose against hers and she laughed, breaking away and rubbing her nose with the palm of her hand. Seaweed leaned down and brushed his lips against Penny's. She started to giggle and he pulled back and looked at her with a cocked eyebrow.

"You need to shave. You tickled me!" she said. Seaweed grinned. He allowed his hands to slide down her sides and then he began tickling her ribs.

"No! No!" she shrieked, laughing all the way. Seaweed began to laugh, too. She broke free and ran to the other side of the room. Seaweed chased her. Penny fell onto their bed and rolled over landing on the other side. She started to run for the door. Seaweed lept on top of the bed and jumped from it landing behind Penny. He reached out and grabbed her, wrapping his arms around her waist. She fell backward and he caught her, but then he lost his balance and fell to the floor. The pair was laughing so hard neither of them could breathe. Once Penny had caught her breath, Seaweed was at it again, tickling her until she turned bright red with tears rolling down her face. Seaweed released her and fell backward. His sides hurt from laughing so hard. Penny was banging her fist on the floor as she laughed. As the moments passed and the panting slowed, Seaweed stood up in one fluid motion and reached down to help Penny stand.

"C'mon, girl!" he said licking his lips. "Let's go downstairs and finish making dinner." He extended his hand and she took it. They happily took the stairs hand in hand. Seaweed leaned over and kissed Penny's temple before they walked into the kitchen. There was no trace of Link or Tracy. The table had been set and a single taper candle flickered in the middle. Green beans, mashed potatoes, gravy and meatloaf all waited on the stove. Seaweed walked Penny to her chair. He clicked off all the burners and proceeded to fix them each a plate.

/ . /

Hm... wonder what happens next?

#### 4. Chapter 4

No ownership implied of Hairspray, songs, figures, etc. Just writing for fun. Thanks for the reviews and the follows! Y'all don't know how much I appreciate it. :)

/Onward/

"It's getting bad over there, isn't it Link?" Tracy asked. She was sitting on the couch fumbling with her crocheting. She still wasn't amazing at it, but she had only been doing it for a couple of days. Link was staring pensively out the window. It had been three days since the devastating news that Seaweed would have to go in to be evaluated. Link knew Seaweed was in top physical condition. He would get a high ranking. He would leave on the very first lotto pick. Link had watched for the mail carrier every day since. He knew he had to be next.

"Yeah sweetheart, real bad," he said, but he left it at that. The mail carrier was headed towards their building. Maybe Seaweed had the right idea. He didn't know he would be called in for the draft. Though they both registered at 18 when they were supposed to, they had somehow slipped through the cracks. It had been a tremendous blessing at the time, but in hindsight, Link might not have married Tracy. He felt guilt churn in his stomach just for thinking so. He shoved the nausea from his mind. The last thing he ever wanted was to make Tracy a widow. When the mail carrier entered his building, Link casually walked to the front door.

"Mail's here," he said in a nonchalant manner, though he thought he might have to swallow his heart if it rose up any higher in his throat. Link scooped up the letters and casually leafed through them, pretending to read each one and examine it. Billâ€| billâ€| late Happy New Year cardâ€|

"Link?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. He flicked his eyes up to her. "Please just shuffle through and tell me you're safe." Link sighed a heavy breath through his nose and nodded curtly. He flipped through the remaining letters and thankfully, not a single one was from the government. He heaved a sigh of relief as he plopped down on the end of the couch.

"We're so lucky, right babe?" she asked, though the heartbreak in her voice was evident.

"Yeah," he said emotionlessly, "real lucky." Tracy set her crochet aside. She scooted to his end of the couch and laid her head on his shoulder. "I need to get a shower. I'm supposed to meet with Corny today," he said. Tracy frowned.

"Sorry," she whispered, but he had not heard her. She sat back at her end of the couch and put her energy into finishing the little yellow hat she was working on. Link walked to the bedroom and shut the door behind him. He leaned against it and blew out a breath he didn't know he was holding. He bowed his head and slid his eyes closed.

"Please God, if you have to take me and Seaweed out there, please bring us back alive, I'm begging you." He opened his eyes and proceeded to get ready to meet Corny.

Link climbed the stairs toward his apartment. The meeting with Corny had been uneventful. None of them could really focus on making the show more upbeat when three of the new "Nicest Kids" had been drafted right out of high school. Link opened his front door.

"Honey?" he called. There was no answer. The apartment was eerily

silent. The air felt like it was filled with static. Link felt the hair on the back of his neck raise. "Sweetheart?" he called again, peeking into the livingroom and kitchen. His stomach flip flopped inside him. His bedroom door was open. "Little darlin'?" he asked. Tracy was sitting on their bed. The hat she had been working so hard on had been torn apart. The yellow yarn was strewn about the room. "You were almost done," he said gesturing to the heap. Tracy's eyes lifted to his. He'd never seen her look so sad. "What the hell is going on Trace, you're scaring me."

"Only the worst day of my life," she cried. Link stepped toward her, and she held up her hands in protest.

"What did I do?" Tracy looked away as the tears welled up. "Please Tracy, please, I'll make it better, whatever it is." She reached to her right and lifted up the dreaded envelope he knew would be on its way. He put a hand to his mouth and she burst out into tears. Link ran to her and threw his arms around her.

"No-don't!"

"Why are you mad at me?"

"I'm not, I-"

"Trace, you can't push me away over this. It's not my fault!"

"I'm not pushing you away because of that. I'm pushing me away."

"Why?" he asked, refusing to let go of her, even though she fought against his arms. She heaved a defeated sigh.

"I lost the baby."

"Sorry to see you here, Cracker boy," Seaweed said. He walked up and gave his best friend a handshake.

"Sorry to be here," Link flashed his best stage smile at Seaweed. Seaweed caught the insincerity but he let it go. He wasn't happy to be here, either.

"Man, ain't this a mess. You know we're going to be classified as I-A's, right?"

"I'm hoping for I-A-0 myself."

"Man that classification is an illusion. They're going to throw us all in the pit. All of us except tubby down there on the end. You know he'll probably get to stay home. What I wouldn't give to pack on a couple hundred pounds."

"Harsh, Seaweed," Link scolded, but Seaweed shrugged his shoulders.

"I ain't makin' fun of the man. I envy him. He's prolly got a woman he gets to stay with. Here goes old Checkerboard Seaweed out to war. I'd do anything to stay with Penny."

"I know how you feel."

"It's not too late to set Tracy up next door to Penny. She can help Tracy take care of the baby!" Link's eyes flashed and his expression became pained. Seaweed frowned.

"Link?"

"I don't want to talk about it," he spat. Seaweed scrambled to change the subject.

"Well, uh... if we both get back, we'll be neighbors... or if at least one of us gets back he can watch over the other's girl."

"We're both getting back, Seaweed."

"You don't even know if you're going for sure yet, guys." IQ said over their shoulders.

"Hey there, IQ! They got to you too, eh?" Seaweed asked.

"Yeah man, heavy situation we got here, but every man's got to do his duty for his country. You don't want communism to spread, do you?" Seaweed and Link shook their heads in the negative. IQ excitedly patted them both on the shoulder and then walked away.

The physicals went well and were slightly less embarrassing than they expected despite being lined up semi-nude around a bunch of other guys. It was kind of like being in a locker room, but it felt like being lined up like cattle. Representatives from every military branch were there. Physical exams and intelligence quizzes were administered over the course of the day.

Shortly after the exams were finished, the marine representative walked up to Link.

"We've chosen you to be part of our ranks," he said simply. "We take only the best."

"If you take only the best, sir, you must be mistaken. My friend Seaweed here is the best of the best." The officer looked Seaweed up and down. "A team? Friends." He smiled to himself. "Alright, men, you're both to report back here tomorrow at 0800 hours. Kiss your families goodbye. You're going to war."

"Wait, WHAT?!" Seaweed asked, but the officer turned and walked away. "No man, this ain't how it works! They don't send us right out like this! What the hell have you gotten me into?!"

"I didn't know-"

"Come on, Link!"

"Well you know what, Seaweed? It wasn't intentional, but I'm glad it happened!"

"You glad?! You crazy?!"

"Look man, if we have to go over there, we can watch each other's backs. We can make sure we get back home. Don't you see what a great

gift this is?" Seaweed scoffed, shaking his head.

"Yeah, the best gift I ever got. I'ma be stuck with Cracker boy in the middle of the jungle instead of being here with my wife."

"That's not my fault!"

"He wanted you, and you volunteered me."

"Seaweed-"

"Forget it, man! It's done. Ain't nothin' we can do about it without bein' draft dodgers. I'm going home to spend time with my wife. I suggest you do the same."

"But-"

"Goodnight," Seaweed said, shaking his head and walking away. Link frowned and stared down at his shoes.

"See you guys in the morning," IQ said sheepishly as he walked past Link.

"Well?" Penny asked, jolting awake the moment she heard Seaweed open the front door.

"I could have been a robber! Why wasn't the door locked?!"

"I fell asleep, I didn't know you'd be gone so long."

"You can't do that Penny. Always lock the door. It's important."

"What?"

"Penny," he said, sliding in on the couch beside her. "I won't be here to protect you. I have to know you are being proactive about this."

"If I didn't know better I would think you're mad at me."

"A little, yes!"

"Seaweed," she whispered, shaking her head. "You're never mad at me. What's wrong." Seaweed let an exasperated sigh.

"I'm set for the front lines."

"What?!"

"I don't know where they would have put me, but then came Cracker Boy to the rescue. He volunteered me for the Marine Corps. Ain't that nice?"

"What? Why would he do that?"

"I don't know. He seems to think we can watch each other's backs."

"Why can't you? Tracy and I will be."

"That's different. I'd be guaranteed a chance to come back home if I got the right branch. The Marines are the most hardcore guys we've got."

"Then that's who you should be with."

"Whose side are you on?"

"I only meant that if they need the best and you are the best, maybe you can end this dumb war."

"Yeah, if only Penny. I'd love to be able to come back home in a few weeks. I don't think you realize, I'ma be gone for a long time. A very long time. There's a big chance I mayâ€|" Seaweed trailed off seeing the emotions cast over Penny's face. Her face fell to her cupped hands and she began to sob. "What I mean is there is a big chance I may have to be there for a while, that's all," he said, wrapping his arms around her to console her. "And I'll be the luckiest guy there because I know you'll write me all the time, right?" Seaweed chuckled to himself. "I hope Tracy pushes you to write me."

"It's not that I wouldn't write, I'd probably just forget to send!" she mumbled into his chest. Seaweed laughed louder. How he loved her sense of humor.

/Link/

Link couldn't stomach going directly home. He had spent most of his last night driving around screaming obscenities into the wind and blaming God for his current predicament. He eventually found a quiet, dark place to park. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the seat pondering his life. He had been blessed with fame. He wasn't as big as The Beatles, but he was pretty popular and widely recognized. Elvis Presley had enlisted a few years before and served his country. What was Link's big hang up? Tracy's visage floated across his mind's eye, and Link's eyes flew open to be rid of the image. It was her. It was always her. From the moment he met her he knew she would be something else altogether. She would bring life to the Corny Collins show. He wanted her on there for selfish reasons. He wanted higher ratings and the excuse to dance like he'd never had a chance to before. He felt the moves inside, but he didn't have the right outlet for them until Corny had agreed to take Tracy on after the hop. It was a whirlwind adventure from the start.

He smiled, rolling his head to the left to stare at the halos of street lamps that dotted the otherwise blackened night. She was like a streetlamp in that she gave light to the darkness in the world.

\_What would you do for her? Would you stand beside her? Would you flee? Didn't you promise to protect her forever? What would you do?\_ His voice echoed in his mind. \_What would you do for HER?\_

"I'd die for her," he muttered. Yes, he'd fight for his country, even in this unwinnable war. It was Tracy who would see him in. She would be the beacon to see him home. He exhaled, defeated. This was his life, no running away. Between he and Seaweed he knew he could make

it back home. He worried about her being alone for so long. He hated leaving so soon after she had lost their only child. Link frowned. He sat up in his seat, bowed his head, closed his eyes and prayed.

"Dear God, my wife is usually the one that talks to you. I just don't know what to say. I guess I should start by telling you I'm sorry for yelling at you. I guess you're used to that but it doesn't make it right. Please, I don't care what you plan for me, but don't hurt her. Don't let anything hurt her. Don't you know how much I love her? Don't you know she is everything to me? Please keep me and Seaweed alive, God. Please bring us home. We need you over there. All our friends are getting called. I know a lot of guys who are already living with you, but I am not ready to go yet. Pleaseâ€¦ please don't take us," he whimpered and paused, running through his mind looking for how Tracy would end the conversation. "Uhâ€¦ amen then, sir," he stumbled over his words. He opened his eyes and wiped them with his hands, previously unaware of the tears that had formed. He put his car into gear and drove home.

At home, Link stared at her sleeping form. The moonlight shone through the window and cast strange shadows against her unusually pale figure. The hills and valleys of bunched blankets added to the visual. She was perfect. Link watched her for a moment longer as he undressed. He pulled on a white shirt and a pair of pajama pants. He walked over to the bed and slid in next to her wrapping his arms around her. Tracy's eyes immediately fluttered open. She yawned. A sudden realization filled her, and her face grew into a big sleepy grin.

"Link! I'm so happy to see you!" she said, wrapping her arms back around him. He stared at her, but he did not smile back. Her eyebrows drew. "Link?"

"Tracy, I love you so much," he said as the tears started to come. Tracy sat straight up, and Link slowly followed.

"Link, please, what's going on?" Link took her hands in his.

"They're shipping me out baby doll. I'm gone tomorrow morning," he said. His bottom lip quivered and he bit the inside of his mouth to stop it. He felt his stomach knot as her face ran a gambit of emotions before it fell into grief. She threw her arms around Link and began crying on his chest. Link stroked her hair and kissed the top of her head.

"I love you," he whispered repeatedly.

/The next morning/

Link thought it would be better to leave before Tracy woke. He gently pried her arms from around him, silently thanking God she had not woken. It would still be another couple of hours before he had to report, but he couldn't rest. His nerves were too bad. Link walked into the living room and opened up his desk drawer. He reached inside and pulled out a sheaf of paper. He began to write little notes on each page. Some were as simple as a heart with his and Tracy's names inside. Some were several sentences of Link pouring his heart out to her. Some were memories he wanted to share with her, including the

hilariously embarrassing moment he'd watched her smack her own rear in detention. He folded each note and by the time he was finished, light was beginning to shine at the bottom of the window panes. He didn't have much time before Tracy would be awake. He began planting his letters all over the house. Some he knew she would find right away. Others, like the one in the medicine chest, would remain silently waiting. He wished he had a grander romantic gesture, but there was so little time and he needed her to be reminded every day just how much she meant to him. Link clenched his teeth to keep from crying. He couldn't say goodbye. It would be an impossibility. If he saw the disappointment on her face again, he would shame them both by dragging her away from everything she knew to hide out in the woods somewhere. No, someone high profile like him couldn't go missing. It wouldn't be right or fair. He had to be a man. Link dressed himself. He took one last look at his wife and headed out the door.

/Seaweed/

Seaweed's eyes slowly drifted open. Penny was staring at him. He smiled at her, but she didn't return his smile.

"Can't we run away?" she asked. Seaweed sat up. He brushed her hair behind her ear. He loved the way she looked when she wore it down, though nostalgia had him wishing she was wearing her trademark pigtails.

"I can't run from a fight. Had I run from what was right, I never would have found you."

"But this isn't right!" she said. Seaweed placed his hand on the side of her face and then leaned in and kissed her.

"It isn't right, and I don't want to go. But it's even more wrong to not go." He pressed his forehead to hers and they stared into each other's eyes.

"Then promise me you'll come home safe."

"I promise you that not only will I come home safe, but we're gonna get married right away. Start planning our wedding." He smiled, and Penny mirrored it. She threw her arms around her neck and hugged him.

"I've never been so in love. I don't know what I'll do without you."

"Then don't think about it. I'll be home before you know it," he said, gently pulling away from her. "I've got to get ready," he said sadly. Penny nodded. She left the room and began preparing breakfast. Seaweed came downstairs to find his plate was ready and waiting. Penny sat beside him. They didn't say much as they ate, but they held hands and stared at each other. Seaweed thought how amazing it was that he could never tire of staring at Penny. Penny thought about how lucky she was that the strongest feelings of desire and love she'd ever known had not gone unrequited. She loved Seaweed with all she was, and he loved her equally. The simplicity of staring into each other's eyes had not lost the impact. Her stomach still knotted and Seaweed's heart fluttered. It was the most wonderful breakfast either of them could remember. Penny's big blue eyes grew when Seaweed

withdrew from her. She threw herself on him. They shared a desperate, passionate kiss. Penny's tears began to soak his shirt. He held her for a moment longer and then whispered that she must release him. Penny reluctantly obeyed. She watched the best thing that had ever happened to her walk out of their front door for perhaps the last time.

/to be continued/

Next stop is war. It isn't going to be pretty. :( Sorry the story jumps around. I know it isn't drawn out and fluid, but I have my personal works I'm writing too and I also work so thanks for being patient in that respect. :)

End  
file.